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**Course Objectives and Expected Learning Outcomes**

1. Students will become familiar with or deepen their understanding of basic metaphysical concepts:

Analytic/synthetic distinction
Ontology
Descriptive v Prescriptive metaphysics
Fictionalism
Ontological commitment

2. Students will become familiar in depth with specific metaphysical topics:

"ordinary" objects, colors, sortals, causes, vagueness, supervenience, models

3. Students will improve their ability to carefully analyze philosophical texts and arguments

4. Students will improve their ability to communicate philosophical ideas in writing

5. Students will improve their ability to verbally communicate philosophical ideas

**Course Narrative**

To start with a disclaimer: my seminar will not be so much a course on metaphysics as on metametaphysics. A few weeks ago I sat for two days in the seminar room and listened to some of the best epistemologists--specialists in perception--discuss sophisticated aspects of the question how perception affords us the ability to think about the red cup on the brown table. I refrained from telling (reminding?) them that according to the most widely accepted metaphysical theories there isn't a cup or a table. I partly refrained from good manners, but partly because the metaphysicians can't

agree on whether there isn't ***a*** cup on ***the*** table because there are no cups on any table (because there aren't any cups or tables), or that there are actually infinitely many cups on infinitely many tables. And of course if there are any cups or tables they aren't red or brown because colors aren't real.

Philosophers and science educators have recognized that there is a collection of beliefs the former call "folk physics" and that the latter call "misconceptions". Philosophers of mind and cognitive scientists have recognized that there is a collection of beliefs that they call "folk psychology" and there is debate about whether those beliefs are a good theory or a bad one. (Among the beliefs being scrutinized is that there are beliefs.) In this course I propose to examine whether there is a "folk metaphysics", and if so what it is, where it comes from and what its status is.

Another disclaimer: the seminar is not just about (meta)metaphysics. Some of the objections to cups and tables have to do with vagueness, which means we will get into philosophy of logic, some have to with atomic structure, which means we will get into philosophy of physics, some have to do with cognitive states which means we will get into cognitive sciences and philosophy of mind. One story that some metaphysicians tell to explain the widespread talk of cups and tables is that that is *fictional* discourse, and fiction involves language so we will get into philosophy of language. And since both the folk metaphysics and analytic metaphysics seem to have causation as a fundamental concept, we will need to look into conceptions of causation.

The course will begin with Carnap, who tried to scientifically eliminate metaphysics, and we will read his exchanges with Quine who criticized Carnap and offered a naturalistic alternative. We will then delve in detail into arguments about colors and ordinary objects like cups and tables, do some reading on logics and philosophies of vagueness, some on causation, and some on fiction and fictionalism. Then we will read some recent books and articles and see what sense we can make of all the foregoing.

**The course requirements and grading elements** will be:

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| Weekly pre-class assignments | 13* x 3 =39 |
| Seminar participation | 13* x 1 =13 |
| Oral midterm** | 10 |
| Peer review of projects | 2 x 4 = 8 |
| Project*** | 15 |
| Oral final** | 15 |

* There will be 14 seminars, but I will drop the lowest grade on assignments and participation among the first 13.

**The dissertation proposal exam in year 3 is an oral exam and I think students should be given a chance to practice oral exams before that, so I give my students two chances to practice in this seminar—a mid-term and final. The initial questions will be given in advance (though follow-ups can lead other places.)

***The project will be either a 1000 word book review or a 3000 word paper.You will be able to choose the book or paper topic, subject to my approval and to the condition that it concerns something that does or does not exist at present or in the past. A draft will be due April 18, final version the last day of exams. Peer review will be your comments on the drafts of two other student projects due at midnight on the last day of classes.

Specific topics by week:

1. The end of metaphysics? Carnap and Quine
2. Kinds of metaphysics
3. Color
4. More on color
5. Objects
6. Objects and sortals
7. More about objects and sortals
8. Causes
9. Causes, omissions, gaps and holes
10. Supervenience
11. Disjunctive, summative and other orioertues
12. Models and Reaity
13. Vagueness
14. Metametaphysics

All **materials** will be available in Owlspace or online at locations identified in Owlspace.

Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me during the first two

weeks of class.  All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

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